

REMARKS

By the present amendment, claims 1 – 16, 22 – 39, 41 and 42 have been cancelled without prejudice. Claims 17, 21 and 40 have been re-written in independent form. No new claims have been added. Accordingly, claims 17 – 21 and 40 are presently pending, and allowance thereof is respectfully requested. Claims 17, 21 and 40 are the independent claims.

Applicant wishes to thank the Examiner for the indication that claims 17 – 21 and 40 are allowable if re-written in independent form, and for the acceptance of the formal drawings filed on July 6, 2004.

Claim objections

The Examiner has objected to claims 28 and 29, based on the Examiner's view that these claims contain non-idiomatic English.

By the present amendment, claims 28 and 29 have been cancelled, without prejudice to the Applicant's right to continue to pursue these claims via a continuing application stemming from the present application. Applicant therefore respectfully submits that this ground of objection is overcome.

Claim rejections

The Examiner has rejected claims 1 – 4, 9 – 16, 22 – 29, 41 and 42 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 5,199,758 to Howell.

The Examiner has also rejected claims 1 – 4, 9, 10, 12, 14, 22 – 29 and 32 – 39 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 3,771,699 to Thibeault.

Additionally, the Examiner has rejected claims 30 – 31 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Howell.

Finally, the Examiner has rejected claims 5 – 8 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Howell or Thibeault.

Thus, each of claims 1 – 16, 22 – 39, 41 and 42 stands rejected under either 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) or 35 U.S.C. § 103(a).

By the present amendment, claims 1 – 16, 22 – 39, 41 and 42 have been cancelled, without prejudice to the Applicant's right to continue to pursue these claims via a continuing application stemming from the present application. Applicant therefore respectfully submits that these grounds of rejection are overcome.

Allowable Subject-Matter

The Examiner has objected to claims 17 – 21 and 40 as being dependent upon a rejected base claim, but has indicated that these claims would be allowable if re-written in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims.

By the present amendment, claim 17 has been re-written in independent form, to include all of the limitations of its former base claim 1 and intervening claim 14.

Claims 18 – 20 are directly or indirectly dependent upon amended claim 17.

Claim 21 has been re-written in independent form, to include all of the limitations of its former base claim 1, from which it directly depended.

Claim 40 has been re-written in independent form, to include all of the limitations of its former base claim 32 and intervening claim 38.

Applicant therefore respectfully submits that claims 17 – 21 and 40 are allowable, as indicated by the Examiner in the previous Office Action.

Extension of Time

Applicant hereby petitions for a three-month extension of time, to September 30, 2006, for responding to the Office Action mailed March 31, 2006. A check in the amount of \$510.00 is enclosed as payment of the required extension fee for a small entity. The Commissioner is authorized to charge any fee deficiency, or credit any overpayment, to Deposit Account No. 04-1577.

Claim Fees

As a result of the present amendment, six claims are pending, of which three are independent. Thus, the number of independent claims and the total number of claims do not exceed the numbers previously paid for with the initial filing fee for this application. Therefore, it is believed that no excess claim fees are owing for this amendment. If the Applicant's belief in this respect is incorrect, the Commissioner is authorized to charge any fees that may be required to Deposit Account No. 04-1577.

Conclusion

In view of the foregoing, Applicant respectfully submits that the present application is in condition for allowance, and respectfully requests that a Notice of Allowance be issued.

Should the Examiner have any outstanding concerns, the Examiner is respectfully requested to contact the undersigned attorney at the Examiner's earliest convenience, to expedite the prosecution and allowance of this application.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ralph A. Dowell" with a stylized flourish at the end.

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Encl.: Check for \$510 for three-month extension of time